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HALF THE WORLD'S PEOPLE

**A Report of
the Consultation
of Church Women
Executives**

**Glion, Switzerland
January 1977**

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, GENEVA

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Glimpses of Glion

The Consultation of Church Women Executives, held in Glion near Montreux, Switzerland, January 17-22, 1977, was called by the sub-unit on Women in Church and Society of the World Council of Churches.

The 80 participants came from 40 different countries and from all continents. There were 16 from Africa, 8 from Asia, 33 from Europe, 14 from North America, and 3 each from the Pacific, Latin America, and the Caribbean. They represented many different churches—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and most of the Protestant denominations.

The majority of the participants were individuals who carried responsibility in their countries for work with Christian women, either within their own denominations or at the level of councils of churches. But when you saw them together as a group at Glion their great diversity was clearly evident—differences in levels of responsibility, differences in the church structures and policies they represented, and differences in their individual theological perspectives. They had only two points in common: the fact that they were all women, and a live faith in Jesus Christ, supplemented by a desire to be his true disciples and determination to work out together what this implies.

Marjolaine Chevallier, France

Glion, a small Swiss village high in the mountains above Lake Geneva, was an ideal situation for such a consultation. The delegates arrived in the bright sunshine to find everything white and sparkling. For many, this was their first glimpse of snow, and it dazzled and delighted them.



Konrad Raiser, deputy general secretary of the World Council of Churches, expressed clearly in his address of welcome why the consultation had been called:

The WCC has recently devoted more direct attention to women's rights and the place of women in Church and society, as your conference on 'Sexism' in Berlin in 1974, and its influence on the Nairobi Assembly, testify. It has become abundantly clear that the concerns of women are not marginal or the separate concerns of a particular group, but must be an integral part, an evocative symbol, of the Church and of humankind. It has become clear in our concern about development that the situation of women is the most concentrated expression of the basic needs and aspirations of the developing countries. Again, as we begin to consider alternative styles of life, we can take as a guide the search of women for a way of life that allows them to be fully human and respected, and enables them to play a full part in the life of society.

Further, as we work towards a just, participatory, and sustainable society, we become aware that what are discussed as the concerns of women are in fact the concerns of humankind in general in the struggle for survival in all parts of the globe.

This was further clarified by the moderator, **Sylvia Talbot** of Guyana, in her opening remarks:

We have come together as part of a world-wide movement, the World Council of Churches, dedicated to the mission of the Church. We have come as leaders of women's work to think together how we may use our power and influence to 'stir up the people of God', to mobilize women for better stewardship and more effective Christian witness. We have come to examine the nature and style of mission. We have come to answer the questions: How do we learn to identify and respond to the issues of the moment? How do we encourage women in a ministry which is almost

sure to be disruptive? How do we help women 'to speak clearly, fully, and radically' to the whole Christian community as we were challenged to do in Berlin, by Philip Potter, general secretary of the WCC? How do we move women from the periphery of the Church's life to its centre?

With the exception of the initial plenary session and some speeches and panels to give background and theological perspective to the discussions of the role of women in Church and society, most of the work of the consultation was done in small groups. These met first to identify the issues with which they wished to deal, then divided accordingly into working groups for discussion.

The issues which emerged from these preliminary discussions can be summarized as follows:

- How can we make people aware on a global scale of the realities of the lives women live, of the problems they are facing in the Church, in society, in rural areas, under conditions of special stress?
- How can we communicate these facts to the women in our churches and stimulate them to accept responsibility individually and collectively as "agents of change"?
- How can we empower women to become more articulate and to act in the face of situations which must be changed? What is needed in the way of training, theological education, etc.?

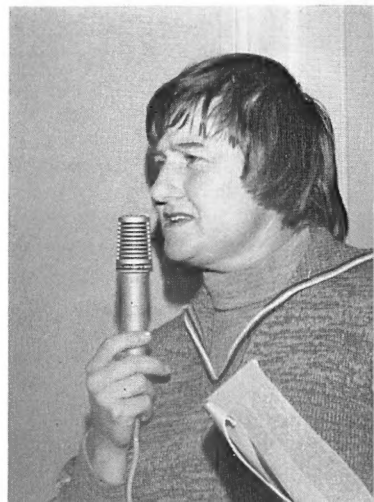
Each of the working groups approached its area of concern from several angles: a sharing of information about the actual situation faced by women both in the churches and in society and what it means to be a Christian in these situations; a sharing of experience of what is already being done by various Christian and other groups, and discussion of what might be patterns for possible next steps—that is, strategies for moving ahead.

Some of the participants had attended many such international conferences; others were having their first experience outside their own country. But the conference made an impact on all. Many expressed their reactions in the final session or in reports written after the meeting.

Lola Mavor, Australia

The things which meant the most to me at the consultation were:

- the theological awareness of the Third World women as a result of their sufferings, and their closeness to Christ and the Bible;
- the need to allow each country to work out its own problems, but the importance of achieving a sense of world-wide solidarity and mutual supportiveness among women;



- the need to awaken the rich and privileged from their complacency to a concern for problems of over-consumption and waste and to the desirability of a possible change in their attitudes and life styles.
- the need for a 'holistic' approach to problems, and to see one's own national or local situation in the light of world concerns.

Sylvia Talbot, Guyana

For me the consultation will be an aggregate of warm and piercing glimpses into the lives of my sisters, and a live glow of identity and solidarity that will remain to temper my own witness.

It will be forever Evelyn, the South African nurse who gave up her career to be a full-time parish worker, and her burden of working in a system as pernicious as apartheid.

It will be Elizabeth, the English woman who, now president of the World Federation of Methodist Women, has also entered a new experience of serving in a rural parish with her husband, a retired Methodist minister.

It will be Ursula, the Swiss housewife who, together with several others, has taken on a chain supermarket, and is effectively learning about and dealing with a situation of oppression of banana workers in some Central American countries.

It will be Avis, whose husband and teen-age daughter have had to go into exile because of their involvement in the liberation movement in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), but who, in spite of this, has stayed with her people to work in the Church.

It will be Juanita, the Guatemalan Indian teen-ager who walks fourteen miles to a village to teach the people to read Spanish so they can get jobs.

It will be Mildred, the black American, whose involvement in a Third World Women's Committee has sharpened her outlook and given her a new and useful perspective on the nature of oppression.

It was an enriching and inspiring experience to associate with women who are part not just of the problems of our world, but of the solutions to those problems.

Rose Juma, Kenya

I thought this conference would be mainly for intellectuals, but everyone has been interested and ready to share with others. This has encouraged me, and I go back knowing that I belong to a wider fellowship.

Sigrid Roemelt, Federal Republic of Germany

Speech failed me when I heard what other women suffer. In meeting with them, theoretical problems get under the skin. As I go home to the problems of my own country—to a middle-class church which touches very few industrial workers—I will put this into a world-wide context. We have learned here of world-wide solidarity.

Marjorlaine Chevallier, France

I left Glion convinced that this kind of a consultation is useful and important because of the opportunity for dialogue it offers. Perhaps we already knew most of what was said, but only in theory and at a distance. It is an entirely different matter when the suffering of the world is seen through face-to-face encounter with another individual.

This kind of encounter is essential if we are to make rich countries, which waste so much of the world's resources and assume they have a right to plenty, aware. The awakening of awareness of this ongoing injustice, which has been created by a system of capitalist exploitation from which we (whether we like it or not) have benefitted, is indispensable. And it is good that it is a group of Christians which demands this, showing us the example of their obedience so full of risks and faith.

I go home with a great sense of burden and responsibility, and of fear of the future. Yet I go back with a new sense of hope and belonging. I have met people who care. Every moment of the day and night there is a woman praying. Don't ever stop praying. I have a warm feeling of belonging to a fellowship which before I only knew mentally existed. Don't ever stop caring.

A South African participant





I saw the trees,
Outside the windows as we worked,
Backed by the misted mountains and the lake.
Heavy with snow they were
When first we came,
Dark branches masked in white.

Almost not trees,
But lovely shapes.
Good to the eyes
In the sharp contrast of their black and white.
But not quite trees.

Then, with the thaw,
The snow began to move.
Some branches dropped it suddenly
As if a heavy burden had been lifted.
Others more slowly,
Drip by drip,
Irregular
But steady.
Once the sharp fingers of the sun had probed
There was no holding back.
Even for those more stubborn than the rest

On which the snow, seeming so soft and light
At first, had hardened to a stranglehold,
Even for them, in the pale sun,
Slowly—
And painfully perhaps—
The white mask melted.

Until at last,
There stood the trees.
The soft deception of the snow all gone.
Naked against the wintry sky,
Bare branches twisted into strange deformities.
No longer beautiful,
But real.
No longer muted shapes,
But trees.
Cradling within their empty arms
New life.
A swift upsurging hope
Which, open now to sun and sky and air,
Would very soon
Show forth that life
In a great jubilee
Of fresh green leaves.

The Lives Women Lead

Konrad Raiser reminded the consultation:

It has become abundantly clear that the concerns of women are not marginal or the separate concerns of a particular group, but must be an integral part, an evocative symbol, of the Church and of humankind.

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If it is true that the concerns of women must be recognized as important to the life of the total Church, it becomes imperative that we women become aware of the realities of the lives women lead in different parts of the world. How many of the women in affluent westernized urban environments understand the problems faced by women living in the rural areas of developing countries? How many of those living in rural poverty understand the problems of the affluent woman? What do we know about the differences in the position of women in our various churches? How many of us comprehend the special situation of women who are living in conditions of stress, political tension, racial discrimination, social injustice? Yet, until we become aware on a global scale of the life situations of our sisters wherever they are, we can never find ourselves united as women and as an integral part of Christ's Church. The Glion consultation was a time of rich sharing of life experiences. We bring to you in these pages some of the cold hard facts, some of the lights and shadows, some of the atmosphere of the lives of those who were there, as well as a little supplementary information from other sources.

The lives women lead

IN THE CHURCHES

Gudrun Diestel of the **Federal Republic of Germany** is on the staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hanover. She supervises the departments of the life and work of congregations, and of women's work, and is responsible for pastoral services to those in universities, prisons, and other institutions. She gave a glimpse of the role of women in the churches of her country.

Women have always found a way of serving and witnessing as members of the Church in Germany, whether they have been recognized and given 'status' or not. The sphere of women's service in the Church has remained pretty much the same through the centuries. There have been talented women, mystics, prophets, writers. There have been women at all times who, regardless of the social conditions or the attitude of their church, have engaged in educating the young and caring for the sick, the poor, and the aged—this is part of a great stream of tradition. As women who are part of the Church, we find room for our different talents within a larger unity. We accept our share of the problems of the churches and we try to have a living relationship with past tradition and to be open also to what is ahead. In our congregations today, it is still true that the teaching and caring ministries are largely carried by women, but there has not been much consideration of the theological meaning of these aspects of the Church's work. When I finished my theological studies and began my first job in a rest-home for tired mothers, I thought I was leaving my theology behind; theology was for the academic world and not concerned with life. We are only now beginning to think of the theological significance of the women's movement.



The position of women in the Church in **India** is a very different one, as **Agnes Loyall** of the Methodist Church pointed out. There, Christians are a small minority of the population. In the cities, there may be a considerable number of Christians and different churches, but in the villages, especially in the north of the country, there may be only eight women out of a hundred who are Christian. Also, although literacy is higher among Christians than others, the majority of literates are in the urban areas.

The overall aim of church women's groups is "to unite women of all ages in the task of witnessing for Christ in their homes, their neighbourhoods, and their places of study and work". Whether the Church is a rural or an urban one, women's work has four points of emphasis: spiritual nurture of the individual, evangelistic witness, social service, and women's participation in the life of the Church. Agnes stressed the importance of always keeping in mind the local women's groups because they are the basis of action. She illustrated the ways in which the four emphases are carried out locally:

Spiritual nurture: This is always given priority. It may be through corporate worship in the meetings, prayers, Bible study, books which help the family to have prayer together, Christian Home Week.

Evangelistic work and witness: The women have to know their faith and make their witness in their own surroundings, as well as sharing by their offerings, in money or in kind, in the wider work of the Church; the programme may include literacy, health-care, family planning, and child-care, nutrition and economic development.

Social services: Visits to hospitals, orphanages, the sick and shut-ins; sewing sessions, etc. The consciousness of wider social issues tends to be very limited and the activities in this area restricted.

Women's participation in the Church: It is the prerogative of women's groups to prepare Holy Communion and to clean and decorate the Church for festivals and special occasions. These could be described as 'house-keeping' activities. When one looks at the committees of the Church, it is clear that the social service committee has the most women, with maybe one or two men; the finance and property committees are mostly men, with perhaps the token presence of one or two women; but women's organizations are not recognized in the decision-making bodies of the Church.



Hildegard Fuhr, an ordained pastor and head of the women's work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the **German Democratic Republic**, described the rather different situation there. She noted that the changes in the social and political situation since 1945 have meant that the Church has moved from being a privileged majority to becoming a minority in a socialist state. Women in the GDR today have to discover their identity in four different aspects of life: as workers, as wives, as mothers, and as housewives. And for the Christian woman this search for identity has to be carried out in the specific context of a secularized, atheistic-marxist milieu.

86% of the women in the GDR are working outside the home. In their working life, women can have a missionary function in that they are working alongside marxist colleagues where they have many opportunities (if they are given help in knowing how to use them) to witness in word and deed. They need to learn to translate the Gospel from the traditional language of the Church into something intelligible to people used to secular, marxist vocabulary. As Christian women in a society where equality is established by law, they need to go beyond the law and live in genuine partnership based on the Bible in which rights and demands give way to mutual respect and appreciation.

In marriage and the home, women usually carry a double burden, as most of them work outside the home. The responsibility for bringing up children in the Christian faith cannot be left to the Church and catechism classes alone. Christian influence in home and family life is vitally important, and it is therefore essential that mothers have a sound knowledge of the

Bible and of the relevance of the Gospel to everyday life. In the GDR, women form the greater part of the church congregations today and take considerable responsibility for the life and work of the parish though they still lack equality in decision-making. Many have taken biblical and theological training, often studying while they are carrying secular jobs. Some ordained women are pastors of a church, but often women who are parish workers, deaconesses, district nurses, religious education teachers, or welfare workers have a much wider opportunity for Christian witness in the 'outside world' than does the pastor. The women's work of the Church tries to help women make their special contribution to the life of the Church as a whole. It has found that weekend retreats, inter-parish meetings, holiday fellowship gatherings, study weeks for parents, and courses such as 'Theology for Non-Theologians' offer opportunities for discussion and are effective ways of helping Christian women face the situations they encounter in a socialist society. Women still have a long process of development ahead of them in the Church of the GDR. They want and need the fellowship and support of groups where they can be with other women, but the aim of the Church's work with women ought to be to enable Christian women to make their full contribution as women to the Church and to society as a whole.



Aud Holter came from Norway, a rich country where the wealth is shared and very few in a population of four million know the meaning of poverty. More than 95% of the people belong, nominally at least, to the Church of Norway, which is Lutheran. She spoke on the position of women in this Church.

In parliament and municipal government, the proportion of women is about 15%-16%. In the government, three out of sixteen ministers are women. In the Church, the representation is greater: on parish councils 41%, on diocesan councils 22%, and on the national council 23%. Many local councils are chaired by women, as are two of the diocesan councils. Still, we want to increase the participation of women in decision-making. The feminist movement, including the Christian feminist group, recently had a campaign across party political lines, demanding 50% participation for women on all levels of leadership in society. The Christian group made the same demand for women within the Church, and also for increased participation by women in theological research.

On the professional level within the Church, we have women pastors (2.6% of the clergy), catechists, deaconesses, congregational secretaries, and others. There is, however, still an important group of both lay people and theologians who regard women's ordination as contrary to the Bible and our Church's confession.

The Church of Norway has a strong tradition of overseas mission. At a time when many doors in the home country were closed to women, missionary work overseas provided an open field of service, and still a large

majority of the 1,500 Norwegian missionaries are women. They now work mainly in the fields of health and education under the direction of the autonomous Church of the country, or in development teams in areas where the Church is not yet established. They are still called 'missionaries' because they are supported by the Norwegian missionary societies. These societies have now become channels for much of the government aid for development, since the government recognizes that the missionaries' experience and knowledge of the people and cultures far exceed that of most international agencies in the development field.

However, the main support for this work is given by thousands of small women's groups throughout the country. Fund raising is combined with prayer and Bible study, and information is shared about the churches and the peoples of the countries where the missionaries are working. These are often groups of close Christian fellowship, where people feel free to talk and pray together as friends, and thus another need is met—overcoming isolation and loneliness and the purposelessness of modern society.

Sometimes we feel that progress in the participation of women in the churches is slow, but we must be persevering. The question was already discussed at the first WCC Assembly in Amsterdam, 1948, and there it was said that this was a problem of the whole Church.

Through their work and their close contact with children and old people, with the sick and helpless, women have developed special qualities and human values. It is our responsibility to contribute these qualities to the life of society, thus making it more human.



ORTHODOX MEETING IN ROMANIA

Although the position of women in the life of the Orthodox Church was not specifically presented at the Glion meeting, it was the subject of an earlier consultation of Orthodox women, held in Romania in September 1976, where the keynote address was given by Elizabeth Behr Sigel, professor of philosophy at the Graduate Institute of Ecumenical Studies in Paris. Excerpts from her presentation there give a clear picture of the situation and are interesting to consider in conjunction with what came from Glion.

Questions concerning cooperation of men and women in the Church and the better utilization of women's energies and gifts in the service of the Kingdom are very much in the minds of some Orthodox women. On the other hand, we Orthodox women in western cultures must not claim to speak on behalf of all Orthodox women, nor seek to impose changes in customs which would perhaps scandalize some of our sisters.... For many, the place of women in the Orthodox Church has been assigned to them from time immemorial by nature and by Tradition.

To understand the situation of women in the Orthodox Church, we must look at some basic underlying theological principles. First, the foundation of our spiritual life lies in the Gospels, in the Good News preached by Jesus Christ to men and women alike. They do not contain any theoretical exposition on the nature of women and their specific charisms.

It was in a woman that God became flesh, not using her as a passive instrument, but making the realization of his plan of love depend on her acquiescence and free adherence to her faith. Mary participated in the incarnation not with her body only, but above all by her trusting obedience to God's promise.

In the life of Jesus of Nazareth women were present from beginning to end. Women played an important part in spreading Jesus' message. Despite the injunctions attributed to St. Paul, women did speak and pray and prophesy in the meetings of the early Christian communities... throughout two thousand years women have been conscious of their responsibility as fully baptized members of the people of God.

But in practice the Church's attitude towards women has been a compromise between the demands of the Gospel and the inherited weight of patriarchal structures. Patristic tradition, influenced by the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine, has imprinted on history a concept of the nature of women and a definition of femininity which has deeply influenced the attitude of the Church towards women.

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WORKING GROUP REPORT

As well as hearing about the lives of women in different churches, the working group on Women's Role in the Church's Ministry discussed some basic issues, such as the whole question of the ordination of women, other avenues of service for women in the Church, and women and theology. One participant outlined why the issue of the ordination of women is so complex, and made suggestions as to some steps to be taken:

We come from churches with widely differing positions on women's ordination—some ordain women; others do not and have issued theological arguments against it; yet others have no theological objections but say that the time is not yet 'ripe', and still others have no clearly stated reasons for or against ordaining women.

The current debates indicate at least three major points of argument: fundamental theological reasons both for and against, internal church cohesion, and the possible tensions created in ecumenical dialogue bet-



ween churches. It is often felt that cultural factors suppress serious examination of the status of women in the Church as well as in society as a whole and hinder churches from joining in the debate.

The issues are complex, interwoven, and often so emotionally based that dialogue is blocked before it actually begins. The largest proportion of the Church's membership, especially women, have not taken part in the discussions, and the engagement and commitment of the entire Christian community are lacking in whatever decisions are taken. There seems to be very little movement into new perspectives. Constructive debate is often hampered by continued reference to the same positions, both pro and con. The churches are in need of generating new thinking which can enrich future conversations. It should be normal for women to be included in the discussions so that their insights may spur the Church on to new visions.

National and local church women's groups can be of service:

- by planning congregational and church-wide dialogue;
- by obtaining and examining materials which illuminate the debates taking place in other churches;
- by sharing the results of local reflection with denominational and ecumenical bodies and with women in other regions, and
- by organizing conversations among churches of different denominations in a local area.

Such engagement at the local level will provide those who are responsible for making decisions with fuller information on the mind of the entire Church on the ordination question.

Women are often among those most hesitant to ordain women or to accept a woman as their pastor. Yet, in some churches where women have effectively sought the support of other women before approaching decision-making authorities, these attitudes have often changed. Local churches might also invite women who are already ordained to lead worship so that their reflection on the question can be based on widened experience.

Ordained women report that they still have difficulties in their churches in finding open doors for actual service in parish or specialized ministries. Women in the congregations can call on their denominations to study the actual status of women in the ministry, and engage in affirmative action for the full integration of women into the ministry. They can also work with pastoral search committees to encourage the consideration of women as candidates.

The report went on to note that since only a small proportion of women in the Church are called to the ordained ministry, other roles for women must be explored to utilize their as yet unrealized talents in the total work of the Church. The broadening understanding of the meaning of ministry is challenging, for it recognizes that all persons can share in the teaching, prophetic, and pastoral ministry of the Church.

It recommended that:

All persons in the Church should actively engage in the theological reflection that guides its worship and service to the community. Language about God and about one's faith should come easily to all Christians. Only as we reflect on, speak about, and share together our thoughts about the relationship of our faith to our daily lives will the historic theological concepts of the Church become the vision of the People of God. This is what we mean by 'doing theology'.

What does 'doing theology' mean? In my place of work, a small group of us met for half an hour, fortnightly, at lunch-time, to discuss and pray together. We had no rigidly set themes for discussion; we tended to talk about the domestic matters uppermost in our minds, but to try to see them in the light of what we did know, or thought we knew, about God. There was no sense in which these discussions could have been put under the heading of what is usually termed 'theology', but one member of the group said that she had been more helped spiritually by these discussions than by any church activities she had ever been to; and there were different ways in which we all progressed in truth by sharing and reflecting on what we did understand, rather than attempting to delve into what we did not.

A working group participant

The lives women lead

IN RURAL AREAS

The picture brought at the Glion meeting by the working group on Women in Rural Development was very sobering. Just over half of the women of the world live in the rural areas of developing countries. One thousand million of them. And what kind of lives do most of these women lead? The report of the working group portrayed a typical profile: a woman caught by the chains of poverty, ill-health, ignorance, discrimination; usually malnourished, often pregnant; by tradition confined to the house and farm, spending long hours carrying water and wood, preparing food, looking after children, serving as an unpaid farm labourer. She receives little education and usually remains practically illiterate. She has very few rights in ownership of land, access to credit, or control of property.

The report gives additional facts. Rural women are among the poorest people in the world. The geographic spread of the poor of the developing countries—who altogether

make up about half the total population of the Third World—is roughly two thirds to three fourths in Asia, a fifth in Africa, and another tenth or so in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to World Bank estimates, some 650 million people in the world live in absolute poverty, at the very margin of life itself, and 80% of these live in rural areas.

The working group was concerned with the female half of this 80%, and with finding ways of helping them improve their conditions.



Juanita grew up in a village in **Guatemala**. When she was eight, she went to the city to work to support her family. She went to school and learned to speak Spanish. “Life in the city is better”, she said, “but you lose a lot. Jesus is commercialized in the city, but he lives with us marginals.” After the earthquake, she went back to her village to help the women there. These are some of the things she said at Glion:

A woman in the rural area has a very difficult life because she is deprived of so many things. She cannot say what her problems are or share her experiences or work for solutions. People tell her she has no ideas and besides it is not the custom for women to go to meetings. So she becomes accustomed to keeping silent. Men believe a woman is only good for working in the kitchen and no one pays attention to her. This is an exploitation of human dignity. These women have good ideas, but sometimes they are unsure of what they want to say and they are afraid to speak out. It is very difficult for them to speak. If one does and no one listens to her, then she thinks that what she has been told is right, that she isn't capable of saying anything useful. So she doesn't try again.

A woman who has not reached the age of majority is not allowed to speak when older persons are present. Generally it is the boys who go to school. Women are considered inferior beings who have to learn to cook and weave and do domestic work, but not to use their brains as men do. When a woman marries, she is like an object, something without much value. She obeys her husband and does what she is told because since childhood she has been taught that a man must be obeyed because he is a man.

What must be done is to make these women aware, so that they wake up a little and realize that their situation is not good. The poverty and indignity they suffer is not God's will, but the will of other human beings.

It is other human beings who exploit them, who benefit from their work, pay them unjust prices and exploit their human feelings. Sometimes people use the words of the poor to find money for them, but afterwards everything remains in the pockets of the small world which is called ‘the powerful’. I am only 19 years old, and perhaps you do not believe me, but I discovered this when I worked with the emergency after the earthquake. Contributions were sent from many countries, but often they didn't reach the people who needed them. I thought, if these things happen now in an emergency, what will happen with money sent later? The best thing I

can do is to open the eyes of these people, as mine were opened. Once teaching begins it never stops. They can learn to read and write. They can learn to put roofs on their houses. They can learn to speak out.

Rose, who works with women in the rural areas of **Kenya**, also spoke of the need for helping women gain confidence. "I try to make them feel proud of being women", she said, "and not ashamed of it. After all, in Africa at least, they have a certain power in the family. They are the ones responsible for providing food, for carrying the water, and for looking after and educating the children. Yet they are seldom given credit for this, and so cannot themselves feel the importance of what they are doing."

Rural statistics seldom take women's role into consideration. Even when they do, the picture which emerges is often ludicrous because it is based on false assumptions. One writer on the subject * has pointed out that if only paid work in the modern sector is classed as "work", then it is easy to see how a responsible government department could issue a statement saying that only 5% of women in Africa work. Although the UN reports that 60 to 80% of work in the fields in Africa is done by women, working up to 16 hours a day during planting season, yet "agricultural work done by family members is not recorded as work".

Rural women in developing countries everywhere play such a vital role in food production and in the nurturing and education of the next generation that it would seem only reasonable for their contribution to be recognized and supported. Unfortunately, as long as their work is not recognized as "work" and they do not show up in statistics ("the holy building blocks of developers"), then planners will not plan for them, trainers will not train them, and those who provide labour-saving technology will continue to have only men in mind. Women suffer all too often from what FAO has referred to as "low social visibility".

This sharing between women from the so-called "developed" countries of Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand and those from the "less-developed" areas of the world in Asia, Africa, and Latin America was one of the most moving and memorable aspects of the consultation at Glion. It could so easily have been a con-



frontation between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have nots, the exploiter and the exploited, but instead it was an encounter between those coming to seek together to understand each other's lives and our responsibility for each others. Those from the First World were humbled by the patience and openness of spirit with which their sisters from the Third World tried to make real the lives they lead.

The lives women lead

UNDER CONDITIONS OF STRESS

At Glion, fully as dramatic as the differences between those participants who came from rich countries and those who came from poor, were the differences between the women from free democratic societies and those living in conditions of special stress. In some cases, the stress is political. In others, it is a systematic violation of basic human rights which creates a constant threat of imprisonment and persecution.

WORKING GROUP REPORT

The members of the working group on Church Women and Human Rights shared freely with one another information about these conditions of special stress under which some of them are forced to live.

Julia, a journalist from **Latin America**, declared that she had no expectation of development bettering the situation of the majority of the people in her country. In Latin America, the issue is one of power and who wields it. Today that power is in the hands of a few big land owners backed by foreign corporations who have complete economic control and therefore are the ones who make decisions, control legislation, and manipulate political authority. Modernization of agriculture will mean only more wealth and more power for the same group. It will increase the poverty, misery, and repression of the masses. Present-day laws are on the side of the powerful, and any who try to improve the situation of the people are imprisoned and often killed. Julia asked the question—how can a Christian live under this kind of capitalist system without protest and remain a Christian? For her, Christian commitment demands identification with the poor in their struggles. It requires Christians to be aware—and to make others aware also—of the effects of the big multinational corporations on the economy. If injustice is to be overcome, church women must find ways of getting financial assistance and support in to groups, even though they may then become centres of revolutionary movements. Too often the Church has allied itself with the status quo, and claimed that the present order protects “Christian values” by preventing a “communist” take-over. But Julia

* *J. Tinker*, Women and World Development, Overseas Development Council, Washington, D. C., USA, 1976.

seriously challenged this position, asking whether it was really compatible with the true message of Christ and did not domesticate the Gospel. A small minority of Latin American Christians are raising their voices in solidarity with the oppressed and some are paying for this with imprisonment, torture, and even death.

Patricia Knox from Northern Ireland told the consultation at Glion what it's like to live in a country which has been torn by violence for the last seven years. Women have suffered the most as they have seen their husbands, sons, and daughters caught up in terrorism and hate, their homes destroyed, their loved ones killed, and normal life in ruins. The schism between Catholics and Protestants is accentuated by unemployment, bad housing, and the lack of recreational facilities for the young. Pat Knox reported:

The turning point came in August 1976 when Mrs. Betty Williams saw three children run down and killed and their parents injured by a terrorist car. Shocked and horrified, she was determined that somehow this meaningless killing must be stopped. She began to call her neighbours. Mairead Corrigan, the aunt of the children, joined with her to persuade the women of Belfast to come out onto the streets and demand that violence be replaced by peace. At the funeral of the children 10,000 women responded and came out to march, Protestant and Catholic alike, and the Peace Movement was born.

Friends at Glion who came from a Southern African country asked the participants some disturbing questions:

Suppose you were seized by the Security Police and held for months and months without being brought to trial,

**you were kept in solitary confinement for days,
you were questioned for hours and hours,
you were not allowed to see your family or a lawyer and did not even know if anyone knew where you were.**

Suppose you were the mother or wife or daughter of a detainee, and

**you did not know where he was,
you were not told why he was taken,
you were not allowed to see him nor to arrange for a lawyer to see him,
you were completely cut-off and did not know whether he was alive or dead.**

Suppose you were banned and put under house arrest and

**you were confined to your home for 24 hours a day,
you were constantly watched by the Security Police,
you were torn from your family and exiled to an isolated place in the veld for unstated 'crimes' for which you were never tried.**

For some, it is "suppose", but for others it is a daily reality. All of these things are happening to women and their families every day in certain parts of the world. They were made vivid to the participants through a film made in South Africa during the confrontation at Soweto in June 1976.

Among the other women cited by participants as living in conditions of great stress were migrants, foreign workers whose situation has become precarious because of increased unemployment, prisoners, and domestic help in Latin America.

A participant from the **Philippines** brought to the consultation a challenge from the working group on Human Rights:

Human rights lie at the very heart of our emerging ecumenical concerns: social justice, people's participation, and self-reliance. Yet I have been told again and again that the issue of human rights and political prisoners is basically a western priority, with no more than peripheral bearing on the more overriding problems of disease, hunger, and poverty. After all, the hungry and the illiterate cannot be expected to bother with middle-class preoccupation with free speech and free press nor with elections and opposition parties. What is the actual record so far? In countries where civil rights have been suspended, in response presumably to the critical problems of poverty and social inequalities, it is largely the poor—the peasants and the workers, the slum-dwellers and the cultural minorities—who carry the full weight of the burden. Unable to organize freely for the protection of their rights, they are helpless in the face of increasingly onerous exactions from multinational corporations, landlords, and big capitalists.

The revolutionary situation in many parts of the world has freed thousands, perhaps millions, of women from their traditional roles and female stereotypes. That is, progressive mass movements have drawn increasing participation and leadership from women. In the Philippines, for instance, hundreds of Catholic nuns regularly join mass demonstrations and prayer rallies, cordoning off the marching workers, students, or slum-dwellers from police harassment. A few of them are also believed to have joined the guerillas in the countryside. This is not to mention the many leading members of the first militant feminist organization in the Philippines, who are now either forced into hiding or have joined the underground opposition. One of the better known founders of militant feminism was recently killed by government troops in an encounter.

As a result of this changing role of women in many countries in the Third World, there has been a sharp rise in the number of women political detainees. While many of them may have been politically involved, large numbers are in prison because they happen to be the sister, mother, wife (or even domestic servant) of suspected subversives. With regard to these women, there are a few specific points which need to be underlined:

Women political prisoners are not only subjected to brutal and inhuman techniques of torture, they are also fair game for male aggression. Amnesty International has consistently exposed cases of rape and sexual abuse of women in military safe-houses and detention centres. How do we, as church women, address ourselves to the moral question of torture and rape, regardless of our ideological assumptions?

It is now not exactly uncommon to find women giving birth to and nursing babies in prison. In one detention centre in Greater Manila, women political



STATEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Consultation of Christian Church Women Executives,
Glion, Switzerland - January 17-21, 1977

We, Christian church women executives from 43 countries on six continents, including Protestants, Orthodox and Catholics, meeting together in Glion, Switzerland, January 17-21, 1977, wish to affirm our commitment to justice and human rights, and to peace throughout the world.

We are deeply concerned about the violation of human rights in many of our nations: developed and developing; independent and those still under colonial regimes.

We are shocked that so many of our governments have refused to abide by the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or to sign the UN Covenants which give legal force to many of these.

Women attending the consultation list the following specific violations of human rights with which some are personally familiar:

- Violation of the right to dissent

- Torture of political prisoners

- Prolonged detention without charges and imprisonment without trial

- Detention of innocent friends and relatives of political prisoners and activists as a means of pressuring activists into surrender

- Holding persons incommunicado

- Sexual abuse of women detainees by male guards and animals

- Secret trials, not open to the public

- Arbitrary censorship of the press

- Financial contributions to election campaigns by multinational corporations

- Attempts by developed countries to de-stabilize countries that are struggling for self-determination

- The rising tide of militarism

- The lack of accountability of police to the society in police states

- Subtle and overt practices of sexism, racism, and tribalism

- Economic exploitation

- Violation of the right to religious freedom

- Demolition of squatters' settlements

- Killing of children as they publicly demonstrate against colonialism and injustice

- Violation of land rights

- Manipulation of people by para-military organizations

We therefore call upon each one of us present at the consultation, our organizations, our denominations, the World Council of Churches, our governments, and the United Nations to be active and vigilant in the pursuit of justice and human rights. Finally, we pledge ourselves to deepen our awareness of the root causes of the denial of human rights and to work toward the development of structures and systems which make possible just and humane societies.

prisoners early last year led a successful hunger strike to demand the release of three nursing mothers under detention. What does this say to us church women and our understanding of feminist solidarity?

The increasing number of political detainees today has given rise to vast numbers of families being suddenly deprived of the sole breadwinner. How can church women effectively minister to the families of political prisoners, to wives and mothers who, without previous job training or experience, now have to fend for themselves and their children? One interesting experiment is going on in the Philippines, through the Family Ministries of the National Council of Churches, which is developing a programme aimed at organizing families of detainees for self-support. It is in this programme that political prisoners are making handcrafts and artwork for export.

But detainees cannot be our only concern.

What about former union members and organizers, many of them women, now forced out of their jobs? Or female students and faculty members banned from schools? Are there effective ways of responding to their emergency situations?

A growing number of children are being abandoned by mothers and fathers who, because of the sensitive and volatile political situation current today, are forced to go into hiding, or to flee into exile, or to join the underground opposition. Don't we, as church women, have special responsibility for these children?

Given the increasingly complicated nature of human rights, the participant from the Philippines said, she had begun to appreciate better the role of traditional church women's organizations and to see a whole lot of possibilities for their involvement in the area of human rights. Precisely because church women's groups fall neatly into the common stereotype of being respectable, of being traditional, of being politically and ideologically colourless, they enjoy wider manoeuvrability. They can play the role of advocacy where most avenues have simply closed.

Perhaps the practical task today is not so much to revolutionize or shake these church women's groups to their foundations (it would take a long time to do that, if it can be done at all), but to use them—with all their limitations, all their traditionalism, all their aura of respectability—to serve somehow the cause of those in prison, tortured or oppressed.

The human rights struggle is now taking on an increasingly global character. Crucial decisions with life and death implications for peoples in Asia, Africa and Latin America are being made elsewhere—in Washington, in the Pentagon, on Wall Street, in other leading centres of the world. More and more, our sisters in the Third World are relying on the support of women who have access to information, to decision-makers in countries where a measure of liberalism still obtains. They will necessarily play a crucial role in this struggle. I would therefore hope that we church women in this consultation can begin seriously to build links of sisterhood and common commitment to human rights and social justice around the world.

A group of Third World women, who met during the Glion meeting, spoke of what they hoped for from their sisters in the First World;

a sharing of information, know-how, and contacts around the world to bring solidarity,

support in their struggle for justice and liberation, opportunities for training,

a system of pressuring multinationals and others who exploit workers in developing countries.



Agents of Change

The consultation also discussed at length how Christian women can become "agents of change". They shared experiences they had had in the Church and in society, urban or rural, local or international. Some were convinced that every day people are forced to take decisions and to change their individual lives according to the way of Christ. Others thought that it was not only a question of personal action but that the fight must also be for a change of structures in the economic and political order. One participant was convinced that God is on the side of the poor and that we therefore should be ready to identify with the poor. Still others felt we must choose our priorities and take relevant action "together attacking" one problem at a time.

All agreed on the vital importance of consciousness-raising.

Lois Montgomery from the USA described how important this had become to her.

One brief example from my own life will illustrate. One of the ways the women's organization I work with engages in consciousness-raising related to global community is to involve women in international conferences such as this, planned to focus on a particular agenda. I participated in such a meeting of North American and Latin American women about five years ago. We met in Mexico, but one thing especially changed my life. It was a bilingual (Spanish-English) meeting. One day in a small group a woman from Latin America was describing some people in her

country as 'savages'. When I asked why she referred to them that way she said that they spoke only their own peculiar language. I was struck by this. I knew then, and said, that by that definition I was a 'savage' in a civilized world. I determined to go home and learn to speak Spanish. I did go to language school at night, and although I am no longer in school, I am still attempting to continue my language study as I can. Through that conference, I came to know that there are people who speak Spanish whom I want to know, not on my terms but on theirs. It became clear to me how wrong it is that so much of the world puts forth so much effort to speak English for my benefit, and the benefit of those like me, when most of us English-speaking people—at least those from the United States—put forth no effort at all to learn another language. I discovered, not just in my head, but in my heart as well, that to speak to people in their own language is a way of really caring. That is my testimony to consciousness-raising through international conferences.

More directly related to the issue of women as women and of consciousness-raising and sexism, the women in the church to which I am related most closely have worked on the problem of sexist language. For example, they have changed words of hymns such as 'Rise Up, O Men of God', that possibly worst example of sexist language in our hymnbooks. One group wrote a version that reads 'Rise Up, O Freed in Christ'.

One of the central revelations of the meeting at Glion was the recognition that each participant was a resource to the others, and that in sharing resources and learning from one another, each could better help the women with whom she works back home. The ideas and experiences shared showed the many ways in which women can help bring about change—through the Church, through other organizations, through the World Council of Churches, through new life styles, and through a new economic order.

THROUGH THE CHURCHES

There are many government-run rural centres in India, but village women do not always know where they are or are unwilling to go to them. The Church, therefore, has tried a different approach. Five villages within a five-mile radius of each other were selected, and college students on vacation were asked to become the organizers. The students lived near the villages for

several days to get to know the people and talk with them about their needs. A central spot was selected for a meeting place and people such as a home economics professor from a nearby college and a government health officer were asked to be volunteers and share their knowledge. The church women provided money for transport. Because the villages were close together and the meeting place not far from any of them, it was not difficult for the women to come. After consultation with the heads of families, it was agreed that the best time for them was between one and three o'clock. Those who were chosen to come were expected to go back to their villages as leaders to teach others what they had learned. The course was only three days so that the women did not get weary of it, and at the end they not only had learned some nutrition, child-care, and better ways of storing food, but also knew where the government centres were and what kind of help was offered, and were not afraid to go and ask for it. It was found

better to select a woman and her daughter-in-law rather than a woman and her daughter, because these two would remain and work together while a daughter would marry and go elsewhere. The students did a follow-up after three months. It was felt that this project not only helped the village women but made the college students aware of the problems and difficulties of women in rural areas.

Anna Thomas, women's organizer for the Mar Thoma Church in **South India**, covers units in the rural area. Her particular concern is for young unmarried mothers, who become a life-time responsibility of the church women's organizations but are largely ignored by society. The Church tries to provide orphanages for the children and homes for the mothers, who are considered unmarriageable and therefore must be given some basic skills and training. Employment openings are sought on their behalf, and a market for their weaving, mat-making, and embroidery.

The Evangelical Church in **Togo** prepares young girls to work with women in the villages. The programme was originally restricted to Christian women, but has now been extended to all who need it. It includes Bible study, cooking, sewing, and child-care. There is also a course to help the women organize their days better in an effort to find time for rest and leisure. Two years ago a marriage counselling service was added.

The Presbyterian Women's Department is working among women prisoners in Buea in **Cameroon**. They act as a "go-between" for them and their families. Children are brought into prison with their mothers. To leave them for long periods in such close quarters, often with very little to eat, is injurious to their physical and mental development, so the church women come and take the children out for walks and feed them. Last year all the Christian women's organizations came together for a mass rally. Half of the money raised that day was used to feed the children in prison. The message on the Women's World Day of Prayer called attention to the deteriorating conditions of these women prisoners. A letter was written to all the pastors of local churches describing prison conditions. This was passed on to the Synod which not only made a donation but also commissioned the Moderator to take the matter to the government. As a result, a regular grant of food and money has been made which will enable the women not only to continue the feeding programme but also to start a programme of rehabilitation for all women prisoners.

THROUGH OTHER AGENCIES

Nadarivatu is a mountain area in **Fiji** at about 3,000 feet, which means it has a cooler climate than the surrounding tropical areas. Most of the men from the villages now work in a recently established pine forest area and neglect traditional food growing. The raising of subsistence crops has largely been left to the women, but they need other

ways to earn money.

The Department of Agriculture now has an experimental sheep flock, as **Fiji**, self-sufficient in beef and pork, has so far had to import all its lamb. The wool from these sheep is a by-product for which the Department has no use. The YWCA, however, saw that it could be used for self-employment craft industries for the women in the Nadarivatu area and the Department agreed to give it to them. Because of the warm climate, the sheep are shorn twice annually, so that the wool is not very long, but the groups have managed to learn spinning and knitting quite successfully. One woman from each village was originally taught the skill and is now passing it on to others.

A local woman is employed by the YWCA to supervise the project and to arrange for marketing through the YWCA's Suva shop.

The area lends itself to the growing of temperate climate vegetables for the tourist hotel trade and women from seven villages and YWCA youth groups are working together to clear the jungle and set up an earning project along these lines.

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A "piglet project" in the **Philippines** supported by Unesco Gift Coupons allows children from poor areas to continue their education. In 1971, as a pilot project, piglets were given to 24 children in two barrio schools. The children built their own pigpens, grew their own fodder, and kept the animals under veterinary control. After eight months the piglets were sold for four times their original cost. The project was re-paid for its purchase, the children's fees enabled the school to continue, and a revolving fund was created to buy more piglets for more children. There are now around 1,700 barrio high schools, not to mention nursery schools, kindergartens, and community colleges, run on the same basis.

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In **Ghana**, the YWCA works with rural women through the teaching of marketable handicrafts, literacy, environmental health, and other aspects of community living. They have found that one of the greatest needs of these women is a place to leave their small children while they go out to farm. Although mechanization has lightened the man's work-burden, the women must still carry their babies on their backs as they do the weeding in the scorching sun, as they harvest the crops, and as they take the final product to market to sell. Three villages, where YWCA youth leaders have already worked, have been chosen for a pilot project in an effort to help these women. The chiefs and villagers have welcomed the idea. Buildings have been released for use as day-care centres, and two girls from each village—all middle-school leavers—are being trained as day-care assistants. It is hoped that nutrition can be included in the programme, that a Parents' Association can be used for educational purposes, and that the formation of cooperatives can lead to agro-business which will eventually support the centres financially.

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Pacajus is a very little town 50 kilometres from Fortaleza in **Brazil**. More than two-thirds of its 33,000 inhabitants are rural workers, although agriculture is difficult because of the dry land. The YWCA there is also small. Its 116 members are almost all young mothers who face many difficulties of poverty, illiteracy, and malnutrition. In one room, which has been lent to them in an old house, the YWCA offers courses in sewing, cooking, and crafts to help these women. In another room lent to them by the Christian Workers' Organizations there is a kindergarten which looks after 25 children. And in a barrack which was originally built as a shelter for animals, the government has lent them space to set up a school for 80 children from five to eight years old. As well as their lessons, the children are given each day a soup prepared from specially nutritive ingredients.

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The Toronto, **Canada**, YWCA Development Education Task Force is a group of women interested in studying issues related to Third World development and producing educational materials and programmes to help others become more aware of

these issues. They felt that since most women are interested in food, this could provide a useful approach to understanding some of the problems of development faced by the Third World. And so they organized an eight-week Alternate Cooking Course, "alternate", that is, to the typical North American cooking which is low in fibre and high in fat, sugar, and processed foods. It was hoped to show how such consumption patterns in developed countries affect the efficient use of the world's limited food supplies. Each of the classes included nutrition information, cooking, and a presentation by members of the Task Force on some political-economic aspect of the world food crisis.



Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, a Roman Catholic nun of the Community of Notre Dame, in the USA, told of *The Institute of Women Today*. This was founded as a result of a conversation which she had three years ago with Anna Wolf of the National Council of Jewish Women. They both saw the need for Jewish and Christian values to be reflected in the Women's Liberation Movement in the USA. The Institute now brings together the major Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish women's organizations, as well as the National Federation of Black Women, the National Committee on Household Employment, and the Women's Division of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butchers. It conducts workshops all around the country; it sponsors research into the historical roots of women's struggle for equality; it arranges for legal advice for women who are victims of injustice or in prison, and offers language study for migrant women.



An NGO UNICEF project has been set up in **Kenya** to increase the availability of safe water to rural women. The programme concentrates on education, maintenance of water equipment such as pumps, and new projects. Individual projects have been suggested on water (wells, boiling for safety, storage tanks, special roofing, windmills, anti-malarial clean-up), village sanitation (clean-up campaign, fighting rats, flies, fleas, and mosquitoes, latrines for public buildings, well covers, home sanitation), the prevention of infectious diseases (immunization campaign, follow up of ill persons, advice on where to get help, nutrition education), and maternal and child health (nutrition, family planning, treatment of simple illnesses like malaria and diarrhoea, village pharmacy, training in health education). Many Christian women are involved in this project through the YWCA or churches. The Kenya Association of University Women, for example, has a pilot project to provide safe water for a dry area outside Nairobi where 5,000 people live.



Associated Countrywomen of the World feel that in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, as in many other developing countries, a priority need is for the training of leaders. ACWW groups are organized to help women gain confidence and experience so they can take charge of their own groups. Through discussion and demonstration, they learn to use valuable time, energy, and local resources to greater advantage, but the teaching of literacy is also important. Without the ability to read and write, they are unable to implement the techniques they learn. Christian groups cooperate with them.



THROUGH THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The Unit on Faith and Order of the WCC, in cooperation with the sub-unit on Women in Church and Society, hopes to help the women of the churches to serve as "agents of change". They are planning a study which expects to involve women at the local level. A staff director of this study on *The Community of Women and Men in the Church* has been appointed. The Rev. Dr. Constance Parvey, a Lutheran theologian from the USA, will take

up her duties in January 1978. The study will be contextual, and invitations to participate will go to churches in all geographical areas, as well as to a wide variety of groups representing many levels of life and thought.

It is the hope of those engaged in this study that it will achieve a number of goals:

- that it will identify, and trace the origins of, some of the distortions in the relationships of men and women in the Church;
- that it will locate signs of hope;
- that it will set new theological directions;
- that it will ultimately lead to more authentic and reciprocal styles of relationships between the sexes on all levels, thus allowing a Church with renewed relationships to become a sign to the world of the purpose of God.

It is clear that while the study will be of a theological nature, its social implications will be inescapable.

Some points suggested for study were:

- vocations for service in the Church,
- partnership in marriage,
- the significance of the full extent of the priesthood of all believers,
- the responsibility for liberating the oppressed methods of interpreting scripture and tradition and the signs, images and symbols of theological language.

To assist those involved in the study, it is proposed:

- to suggest practical strategies for engaging persons in reflection; but also
- to create a network of persons who might be contacted for further assistance; and
- to create resource centres for materials which might provide new insights and fresh approaches to biblical and theological study in all regions, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The study will move towards a major consultation in late 1979, which will bring together the diverse responses and conclusions available at that time. It is expected that the consultation will issue a message to the churches presenting a new challenge on this issue. In summary then this study will be *of the Church, for the Church, by the Church, to the Church.*





THROUGH NEW LIFE STYLES

Not all the efforts of Christian women to bring about change are through either the Church or other women's organizations. Some are social or political. **Reinhild Traitler**, of the World Council of Churches' staff, discussed how Christian women can become agents of change through new life styles.

She began by noting that the search for a "new life style" is not simply a matter of choosing a new mode of living. It raises deep questions about the meaning of life itself, and asks whether people's personal lives today are compatible with the criteria on which the very survival of humankind depends. These criteria include:

- justice for all as a necessary condition for survival;
- protection of the environment;
- overcoming the alienation created by affluence;
- the question of belonging.

Thus, new life styles must be seen in global perspective in terms of social and economic justice, and a balance between the malaise of luxury and the misery of abject poverty. They need to be seen in terms of quality of life for all the earth's people, ensuring an adequate level of the basic necessities for all before considering extras for a few.

Those experimenting with new life styles have a variety of approaches. Behind their experiments is the critically important question of how the average citizen can be motivated and re-educated to realize the global responsibilities which must be shouldered lest the very survival of humankind be endangered.

First, and perhaps most common, is the **assumption of poverty**, the voluntary reduction of income. The motivation for this is that simple living will protect ecology, especially if it avoids consumption of non-renewable resources, and also the hope of rediscovering social values through sharing in community living.

Second are attempts to influence consumption patterns by **reducing consumption** and transferring the resulting savings to the poor countries. Reduced consumption may help both the environment and the poor of the world, but more important, it may be the only process which can give power to large sectors of the population which are otherwise powerless. Through large-scale consumption boycotts, ordinary people can express their social, economic and political convictions and bring about change.

Third are **citizens' lobbies** on specific issues which call into question existing styles of life, of production, of social organization.

Fourth, there is a growing body of **research** that is trying to **design alternatives** for the future. These studies raise forcefully the issue of the finite context with which the earth is confronting humankind. Designing the future cannot mean simply bringing different existing variables of the present into better play, but rather that we have to be courageous enough to think of something quite new and quite different. The problem is that we have no political, social or economic precedents. Therefore, we first must, of necessity, debate about the goals and approaches of the new life style movement and ask what should be the type of new society at both the local and global level.

A hundred years ago, new life styles for the industrial workers meant better living and working conditions and participation in the decision-making processes. Were these

to be reached through collective bargaining or by assuming political power? Socialist theory was that the capitalist system would remain unchanged unless the workers took over control of the means of production. Socialist practice, however, shows that ownership per se does little to overcome alienation or define society's goals.

Consumption is the starting point only because it is almost impossible to organize around the process of production. However the necessary fundamental changes must come at the level of production and, without them, new life styles are just another "trick" of the capitalist system. The workers are ready to make individual sacrifices but only in a framework which will ensure equality for all.

New life styles mean freedom from domination of all sorts, so that people have access to their leaders and can participate in the decisions which concern their own lives. They mean equitable distribution of national wealth and the right to raise and define priorities for development. When these goals are agreed upon, then it will be possible to work out the best ways of attaining them.

Perhaps the question of new life styles is first of all a spiritual question. Certainly there is a biblical basis for Christian involvement in the new life style movement. The idea of *becoming new* is central in Christian thought. The early Christian community understood this in a very existential way; repentance, conversion, salvation had a transforming power on mind and soul. The early part of the Book of Acts describes the consequences of conversion in the early communities of faith (see Acts 2:44-46). This new life of community is completely integrated; it takes care of both physical and spiritual needs. Sharing resources and praising the Lord are activities that belong together. The Church is challenged to become the Body of Christ, and to the extent to which it *is* the Body of Christ, it will also reflect the concern for making an integrated physical and spiritual existence available to the wider community.

What does this imply for church women's groups? Reinhild gave five suggestions.

We must refrain from looking at and encouraging new life styles in an isolated manner. They must be seen as a link in a process of preparing ourselves to build a new type of global society. New life styles must be seen as a tool, not as an end in themselves.

We must recognize that new life styles mean different things to different people. At present, the search is confined largely to those of the middle class in relatively secure positions. What would new life styles mean for those who do not command incomes large enough to allow them to curb consumption and who are not prepared to 'give up' economically?

Is there a common denominator? Can we propagate new life styles without an idea of the type of society that we think should be the outcome?

Church-related women's organizations have to help their members understand more clearly the way in which society functions. Since this has not traditionally been one of their tasks, we may have to rethink the role of our church women's groups.

We must dream about possible alternatives in production, marketing, transportation, education, health services, community life, use of leisure.

We need to encourage our members to communicate and to identify areas of possible cooperation with women of other social groups—ethnic minorities, migrants, working women, rural women. In doing so we may well

discover that the first priority is not how to change life styles but how to articulate the common goal. The new life style of the Gospel is an integrative way of life which holds all aspects together. It is the full life promised in Jesus Christ which is concerned with the whole person individually, and which transforms relationships not only with other people, but with the whole of society.

THROUGH A NEW ECONOMIC ORDER

Few women in the affluent countries know much about the international economic problems which affect their "sisters in the Third World". Most, if they are concerned about inflation, unemployment or environmental pollution, ask how these affect their own standard of living and the quality of their own lives, rather than those of others in developing countries. The importance of greater access to western markets for manufactured goods from the less-developed countries, of fair and stable prices for commodity exports, of protection from the manipulation and exploitation of giant multinational corporations, rarely occur to them as subjects about which they should have a concern and a sense of responsibility. Because of this, those planning the programme at Glion included on the agenda a presentation by **Marion Gallis** of the UN Development Programme on the New International Economic Order recently voted by the Sixth Special Session of the UN General Assembly. For as long as economic and political power structures control the distribution of the earth's resources so that they are not sufficiently available in all regions of the world to meet basic human needs, women must try to work for change. It is important to remember that if one woman understands the need for change, she can convince others. Supporting each other, women can become convinced that change is possible. Then they can organize to mobilize people in a process which involves the formation of local, regional and national political groups to begin the practice of alternatives so that change in the system will be realized.

Marion Gallis pointed out that no economic order has ever been decided, either nationally or internationally, at a bargaining table. It is the result of complex historical processes, thousands of interactions between people at all levels, events and decisions taken (or not taken) by a great many people.

If a New International Economic Order cannot be created at one stroke, she said, then attention must be concentrated on certain growing points which are already discernible on the international scene. These should be strengthened, so as to become powerful agents of change. Examples of such growing points are:

Global management of resources

There were many attempts in the post-war era to free least developed countries from the grip of fluctuating commodity prices. They all failed, because the international community was not fully behind them.

The United Nations General Assembly's Sixth Special Session (1974) which proposed the New International Economic Order opened a new door by calling for a comprehensive approach. Its cornerstone was the *Common Fund* which is now under active discussion, and which would establish *buffer stocks* by buying

up raw materials (tea and coffee, sugar, rubber, etc.) when prices were sagging and releasing them when prices rose. There is strong opposition to this from the industrialized countries, but negotiations are crucial because the concept of consumer-producer cooperation is at stake.

Income security system

Next to proposals for a global management of resources, an income security system for least developed countries stands in the centre of the discussion. Such a scheme would provide those countries where export earnings fall under agreed normal levels with compensatory payments. The payments could take the form of low interest loans, to be repaid when and if the country's export earnings exceeded the normal level. Repayment conditions could also permit conversion of loans into grants.

Until 1975, the International Monetary Fund was the only compensation scheme in operation. The Lomé Convention between the European Economic Community and 46 associates has established another stabilization scheme known as "STABEX". It covers 12 primary commodities of particular interest to the 46 associate countries, and enters into action when a country experiences a shortfall of at least 7.5% of its annual export revenues. Loans must be paid back, interest free, when a recipient country earns exceptionally high export revenues—a condition waived for the 18 countries classified by the UN as "least developed".

Rules of behaviour

A number of codes of conduct are under discussion for the establishment of rules of behaviour in key fields of international inter-action, e.g.

- for the transfer of technology,
- for transnational corporations,
- with regard to restrictive business practices,
- for transport between developed and developing countries,
- for a new law of the sea.

The purpose of all these codes of conduct is to protect least developed countries against the abuse of power by the economically strong countries which have, until now, unilaterally set the rules of the game. And they have usually set them so that they were, invariably, the winners.

What are the chances of international cooperation? What are the possibilities of implementing the New International Economic Order? This, of course, depends less on the soundness of the concept than on the political muscle of those who have launched the concept. The "Group of Seventy-Seven" (i.e. the developing countries) have found a new self-confidence in the realization that the economic apparatus of the industrialized countries, imposing as it is, rests on fragile and vulnerable foundations.

Besides, they have discovered their own alternatives, becoming increasingly aware of the potentials of greater economic self-reliance. On the national level this would

imply a development strategy which puts emphasis on the meeting of basic needs of the majority of their people, needs which could be largely met through the mobilization of domestic resources. This would mean the emergence of a new pattern of economic growth, people's participation, and a more equal income distribution at the same time. Such a re-ordering of domestic priorities would open up opportunities for a substantially greater volume of exchange and economic cooperation among developing countries themselves. It would lessen their dependence on industrialized countries and increase their bargaining power.

The external aspect of such a policy is that, through collective action, least developed countries could offer true alternatives to industrialized countries. They could inflict serious damage by building up a potential for effective confrontation; strengthened through their cooperation, they could provide new relationships of positive value. The external aspect of collective self-reliance has been labelled the "trade-union approach". There is a tendency to over-emphasize this approach without stressing that it will only have a long-lasting effect if it is built on a solid base of internal cooperation among least developed countries and the pursuit of domestic needs strategies. In that case, the growth of collective self-reliance could become a major event of the last quarter of this century and a decisive element of the New International Economic Order.

It is obvious that such a policy will have great repercussions on the structure of international economic relations in the future. So will the internal rethinking of economic priorities within the developed countries, where concern for the environment and a policy of reduced growth (clean living) will result in a different pattern of consumption and production.

In both parts of the globe, the pattern of existing growth is more and more called in question. The question in the developed countries is "growth for what?". In the developing countries it is "growth for whom?".

The search for a new international economic order thus takes place at the same time as countries are searching for a new national economic order for themselves, and the course and direction of the changes involved are less than clear. Two worlds in change are trying to strike a new bargain, with greater dangers for disaster and break-ups, but also with greater possibilities for evolving new structures and institutions of mutual benefit.

Basically, the developed countries have three alternatives for meeting the challenge of the Third World.

- **The western countries could move closer to each other and try at the same time to reduce their international involvement. Internally they could pursue a policy which stresses self-sufficiency as a national goal. There are enough interest groups in any country to acclaim such a course of action. There are serious voices which argue that the costs of increasing inter-dependence have become greater than the potential benefits and that, therefore, the inter-dependence that has come to be taken for granted may well belong to an era that is passing. For the developing countries this attitude and policy would mean a continuation of neglect or, at best, a policy of token concessions.**
- **The industrialized countries could try to come to an arrangement with the 'important' countries of the Third World, by offering them a**

new bargain on the basis of reciprocal benefits. This option would leave out in the cold the poorer developing countries which have nothing to offer; it would uncouple them from the development wagon.

There are certainly short-term advantages for the industrialized countries in such a strategy. They could solve their own economic concerns more quickly, and at lower costs. They could try to integrate the newly-rich into the system of the old-rich countries, to enlarge this system and to accommodate the newcomers. They would avoid, however, making any fundamental changes which would transform the system as such.

- An attempt could be made to overcome the weaknesses of the present system and to create new rules for the game, which would give all equal chances of sharing and of shaping the world.

The question now is: which of the three options will be taken by the countries whose choices count?

Marion Gallis thought they would try all three.

As regards the first option, she said, the developed countries can be seen to be moving closer together within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). They have increased their summit meetings, to coordinate their internal and external policies. Coordination of North-South policy was a key factor at these meetings.

Many of the developed countries, however, feel uneasy at such a policy of "unsplendid isolation". The smaller and resource-dependent countries realize that this is no viable alternative for them. And even the big powers seem to judge a political retreat as too dangerous, particularly as the precarious balance between East and West makes the traditional gunboat diplomacy too risky when interests are threatened.

Therefore, a majority of countries are seriously considering the second alternative of coming to terms with the most important and resource-rich developing countries.

The solidarity among the least developed countries has prevented this tactic and enlarged the circle of participants and subjects. The industrialized countries agreed only after the strategic least developed countries made it clear that there would be negotiations about all problems of the developing countries, or no negotiations at all. This show of solidarity has been a great victory for the Third World.

The failure, so far, of any attempt to split the Third World has opened possibilities for a truly global dialogue on a New International Economic Order. It does not matter where this dialogue happens—in Paris, in the UN General Assembly, in UNCTAD, or elsewhere. What is important is that this dialogue involve all countries on an equal footing. There are opportunities ahead for global solutions, such as the forthcoming Common Fund negotiations. It is only to be hoped that the international community will grasp these opportunities in a constructive way.

Strength through Solidarity

Consultation moderator **Sylvia Talbot** challenged participants at Glion with these questions:

How do we as Christian women respond to the critical issues of our day?

Are we using our influence for the right purposes?

How do we, as women, speak clearly and radically to our communities so that our concerns are recognized as something central and not peripheral?

How do we encourage women to take action for change—even though it may be disruptive?

In the discussion and sharing of experiences, one fact became clearly evident—if change is to be effected in the status of women throughout the world, women must combine forces and find new ways of working together wherever possible. Many examples were given of women working together and, by their solidarity, accomplishing far more than would have been possible for any individual.

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Four years ago, a member of a **Swiss Church Women's Group** spoke up in an open discussion. She had seen a film about banana plantations in Guatemala and was shocked at the low wages paid to the workers. Shortly afterwards, she received her notice for the annual shareholders' meeting of a well-known supermarket company which has pioneered in Switzerland in good quality food at low prices. The card invited comments on the company's policy, so she used it. She wrote that she had

seen the Guatemala film and wished a higher price might be charged for bananas so that plantation workers could be better paid. The company phoned her and offered to show their own film of banana plantations, which told a very different story from the first one. About a hundred women turned up and compared the two film versions. "Now", they said after having seen both films, "we know what lies behind bananas, but we are people without influence. What can we do?"

Just about this time the supermarket company, instead of increasing the price of bananas, reduced it by 15 cts a kilo, which would amount to Sw. frs. 10 million a year. So the women invited 50 of their friends to a discussion and wrote: "We do not accept the reduction in price. The money belongs to Latin America". The company replied that they were not a charitable organization, and the price of bananas remained at the same reduced level.

But the women didn't leave it at that. They collected information and published a News Sheet on Bananas. They bought 600 kilos of the fruit and 40 women then went on to the streets, handing these out to passers-by. With each banana was a leaflet setting out facts about banana production in Latin America, which is largely in the hands of three American companies. Other shops were approached and 50 of them agreed to charge an extra 15 cts a kilo for bananas, and to set aside this 15 cts for development projects in Latin America, the money to be given through Swiss development organizations. People were invited to sign a form if they were willing to pay the extra price and 30,000 did so. And the action has not yet ended. In different regions of Switzerland groups of women are working, informing people, asking them if they will pay the extra 15 cts and looking for more shops willing to help.

The Swiss women have been astonished at the result. Women who had never thought of taking part in public life have gained courage to speak, write letters, plead a cause. Many more have become aware of the inter-relatedness of economic life and have forged links with people whose conditions of poverty are beyond anything they had imagined. "We cannot build our living standard on others' poverty", they say, and have begun to consider their own life style in Europe. At least they know that it is better to attempt something than to do nothing. Through the Banana Campaign they have a new awareness that in the Christian Church "we are members one of another".



Mildred Brown, USA, reported that within the United Presbyterian Church USA there are four sizeable minority groups of women who wish to become active and full participants in the mission of the Church and in their communities. Because Presbyterian Church Women leaders believe that the various ethnic communities who are seeking justice and equality need some sort of channel through which to develop community in thought and action, **The Third World Women Coordinating Committee** was set up. Each of the racial groups—Asian, Black, Latin and Native American—has had its own caucus for some time to bring the pressure of its own particular interests to bear within church structures. But it has become increasingly clear that all the women, in whichever group they belong, are bound together as women—in spite of ethnic differences. This was expressed in the Coordinating Committee's report to the 186th General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church.

The multi-faceted problems confronting non-white women, whether poor, middle class, or affluent, cannot be resolved in any one arena. They can only be resolved as an integral part of the overall struggle of all oppressed peoples against all systems of value that reinforce images of superiority—whether sexual, racial, social, economic, or cultural. Non-white women are the only natural reconciling link between the races and the sexes.

The Asian group (American women of Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Filipino ancestry concentrated largely in California) continues to hold Asian women's leadership development seminars and to study together their historical roots, as well as the significance of today's international affairs for their countries of origin.

The Black women, already organized under Black Presbyterians United in four geographic areas across the country, also emphasize leadership training and have some special programmes related to female prisoners and rehabilitation of offenders.

The Latin caucus (women of South American, Puerto Rican and Mexican heritage) has a special concern for bi-lingual education, and is working to make women aware of their own background and to develop leadership.

The Native American group (American Indian and Eskimo in origin) gives priority to increased job-training and employment opportunities for women, wider knowledge of their legal rights, and leadership development through participation in responsible positions in Church and society.

All these are represented on the new Third World Women Coordinating Committee which has a two-fold task:

to encourage the four groups to continue their programmes and to develop inter-group exchange,

to stimulate non-white women to struggle together for liberation, fulfilment and the creation of a new society.

To achieve these aims, they will seek to heighten their global awareness and sense of identification with the problems of Third World women in other countries, and to involve themselves personally in overcoming the obstacles to their self-development and self-determination. The Coordinating Committee can provide expertise and advice where needed, and is a resource for exchange of ideas and mutual support.

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The **Asian Women's Institute** was organized by the administrative colloquium of the nine Asian Christian Women's Colleges in 1975. (The Women's Christian College, India, Isabella Thorburn College, India, St. Christopher's Training College, India, Damavand College for Women, Iran, Tokyo Women's College, Japan, Ewha Women's University, Korea, Seoul Women's College, Korea, Beirut University College, Lebanon, Kinnaird College, Pakistan.)

The objectives of the Institute are:

- to assist the women of Asia in their groping for self-fulfilment and in their outreach for a better quality of life for all,



- to promote the welfare of Asian women and to enable them to serve their communities by
 - promoting a better understanding of how the varied roles of women can be expanded and improved,
 - assessing and evaluating the impact of change on women and their ability to influence change,
 - promoting channels of communication among individuals, groups and institutions concerned with women,
 - providing an educational laboratory, teaching and research service for students and faculty so as to help make the curriculum more relevant to questions concerning women's needs and roles.

In each of the nine colleges, a Centre for Women's Studies has been established under a local director. Each of these will work out its own programme of special projects with the assistance and coordination of the Asian Women's Institute office in Lucknow, India.

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In the Netherlands, eight Christian Women's Organizations joined together in a campaign entitled **World Sisterhood, the Churches and the Developing World**. The campaign was directed towards a more meaningful contribution by the Dutch churches to development aid in the less-developed countries, especially for women. As a beginning they sought to become better informed as to what the churches and international aid agencies are doing about women's advancement in the developing countries. Now they are seeking ways for Christian women to participate more fully in development activities so as to create a "World Sisterhood"—a network of

awareness of global responsibility of women for each other. They have prepared study material for discussion groups on:

- the position and present changes in the lives of women in the less developed countries;
- women's contribution to national health and public welfare;
- the active economic role of women in agriculture, commerce and the professions;
- women's need for education, training and guidance in their various fields of responsibility.

Out of discussion during study days there emerged four important questions for women in the churches:

- How does your church view cooperation between men and women and how does it intend to realize such cooperation within its own structures?
- How do the women within your church view the realization of the World Plan of Action which was adopted by the United Nations Conference for International Women's Year held in Mexico in 1975 and later voted by the United Nations General Assembly?
- Who is ready to identify the theological questions raised by the World Plan of Action?
- How can the materialistic way of life prevalent in the western world make room for a different approach towards life, and a different assessment of society and of nature.



The **Church Women of Kenya** have decided to form an "umbrella organization" to coordinate the efforts of the church women throughout the country. Such a body will help Christian women in Kenya articulate their needs, hopes and fears, both in the Church and in society in general. It will enable them to get to know one another and what various church and Christian groups are doing. It will provide a structure through which the church women of Kenya can be represented on national bodies and at international conferences, and an organization in the name of which Church Women of Kenya can receive international visitors. It will provide a convenient link for cooperation with the staff and leadership of the National Christian Council of Kenya.



Strength in solidarity was also discovered by the **Women of the Orthodox Churches** at their meeting in Romania.* From that consultation came several recommendations which apply to the ecumenical movement and specifically to the WCC, and which ask for:

- increased participation of Orthodox women in ecumenical meetings,
- employment of more Orthodox women on the World Council of Churches staff,

* See page 12.

- establishing a pan-Orthodox visitation team to visit various countries to learn about the life of Orthodox churches and churches of other confessions,
- participation of Orthodox churches in the study, *The Community of Women and Men in the Church*,
- theological and vocational training to prepare women for work in the Orthodox churches.

Since the Romanian consultation there have been further meetings among Orthodox women both in the USA and in Finland, and other possibilities of involvement in ecumenical projects are being explored.

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A working group of leading church women from various countries in Europe came together in March 1977 to discuss their hopes and ideas for a new Church and a new society in which women and men are equal and can share in their development as partners. They decided that the time had come to call the **Christian Women of Europe** together to share experiences and to work out a common line of action. Their report explains the rationale for calling such a meeting:

Many women have hitherto concerned themselves mainly with problems in their own particular situation. We think we now have to look beyond our own boundaries and get to know women from other sections of society, cultural backgrounds and confessions so that together we can assume our responsibility for creating a more human society. We women have discovered that ecumenical discussion and exchange release us from narrow and restrictive ideas and thought patterns and that we are now neither able nor willing to go back on them. However, we have also realized how our progress towards agreement is hindered by the male-clerical structures of our churches. In the past we women in Europe have failed to make our own contribution to a European consciousness, i.e. we have failed to perceive the economic, political and ideological differences in our part of the world, to relate them to one another and initiate an enriching process of cross-fertilization. In our view, it is only by doing so that we shall be able to contribute to the world-wide debate on justice and humanity's struggle to achieve it.

The working group went on to suggest topics which they felt should be discussed at such a meeting:

A New Society and a New Church

This includes such issues as the need for a new international economic order, environmental questions, a new life style, class structures, inter-denominational encounter and cooperation, and the problem of rivalry between the clergy and the laity.

New Perspectives in Theology

This involves questioning and criticizing our theologies, examining our experience of them (e.g. to what extent they act as a hindrance) and together working

out a new approach. We felt it important in this connection that women theologians should bring women from other fields (e.g. the human sciences) and lay women into the discussion.

Education and Awareness-building

It seemed to us that our efforts for a new society are bound to be ineffective unless our ideas have some influence on our children's education. This means, for example, making sure that the new attitudes to the role of men and women are reflected in the contents of school textbooks. The same applies to adult education.

Questioning Our Own Traditions

An essential pre-condition for the reflection on the foregoing points is our willingness to question our specifically European traditions from a historical and ideological point of view. This we have hitherto avoided doing and have failed to make any real contribution either in our own context or internationally.

Patterns for New Social Structures

Nowhere else in the world are there such contrasting patterns for new social structures as those to be found in Europe. Women can no longer withhold their contribution to the struggle to come to terms with these different conceptions.

They also looked forward to possible lines of action which might come out of the meeting:

- a listing of women's initiative groups working in Europe on feminist theology and the situation of women in the Church and in society.
- a centre where information could be collated and made available to others. This would highlight new problems and subjects for research which could be allocated to individuals, groups and institutions. There is need for a list of women who are competent in a variety of fields and able to undertake certain responsibilities such as membership of committees, etc.
- regular meetings at European level to discuss regional experiences, to learn from one another, to communicate across national boundaries and to reach a European consensus.

Good opportunities for this exist within the WCC study on *The Community of Women and Men in the Church*.

It is now expected that this meeting of Christian women in Europe will take place early in 1978, probably in Brussels.



The World Council of Churches offers many examples of areas in which Christians can find strength by acting in solidarity. Several examples of cooperative action can be cited.

Ecumenical Scholarship Opportunities

Florence Addison, Secretary for the WCC Scholarships and Leadership Development Programme, a participant at Glion, gave information from recent reports.

The mandate for this scholarship programme calls for encouragement of studies within Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. This is to redress the trend whereby most students from the southern hemisphere were sent to educational institutions in the northern hemisphere, and instead to prepare men and women to "express their Christianity in ways suited to their time and place".

The mandate recommends that:

more women be encouraged to apply for scholarships in order to become equipped to respond positively to the needs of their societies and thereby become actively involved in the total development efforts of their countries, in the case of an application for a scholarship for a married person, the spouse be offered a scholarship as well,

the question of family scholarships as against scholarships awarded to individuals be considered. Each application for a family scholarship should be looked at on its merits.

COADY International Institute of St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, has agreed to offer about three scholarships annually to men and women for studies in social development. It is hoped that some of our students may be admitted to their national and regional courses in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In the next few years, COADY awards will be given to applicants from Southern Africa and the Pacific.

The concern for empowering women to become effective members of their communities has generated a special fund of US\$30,000 from the National Council of Churches of the USA for a project "to encourage women who are engaged in full-time service in such fields as agricultural and nutritional sciences, family planning and community health to improve their competence through further training. Special consideration will be given to women who will be engaged in training others". Applications have already been invited from Africa, Asia, Caribbean and the Pacific.

The working groups at Glion stressed the need to increase educational opportunities for women. Church women can strengthen this cooperation by helping the World Council of Churches identify potential scholarship recipients and contributing financially to the support of its scholarship programme.

Programme in Development for Rural Women

The Sub-unit on Women in Church and Society has decided to give priority to work with rural women during the next few years. The programme will concentrate on small-scale projects that directly relieve the plight of rural women. Guidelines set as criteria for responding to requests for aid include:

- support for programmes initiated by women themselves,
- attention to and encouragement of projects not presently on established project lists,

- support of those projects which offer long-lasting and/or multiplying effects for the community,
- the development of resources which would allow the community itself to respond to future emergency situations,
- response to those projects which involve the dimensions of liberation, justice, and self-determination.

A qualified rural sociologist from the Philippines has been appointed to direct this programme. It is hoped that it will involve both urban and rural women, making it possible for them to find a new solidarity as they work together.

The Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society

The World Council of Churches recently has launched the Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society, a venture designed to provide a new way by which the churches can take part in aiding the development of the poor communities of the world. Churches with money to invest are invited to put it into this society. It will then be made available as loans at low interest rates to those who could rarely benefit from conventional banking procedures. There are Third World countries where capital is needed to establish agricultural projects, housing trusts, self-help community schemes, basic medical and educational programmes, etc. It has been established with the conviction that "development, understood as a liberating process aimed at justice, self-reliance, and economic growth, can be promoted through provision of investment capital under reasonable conditions".

The address of the Ecumenical Development Cooperative is

Kon. Wilhelminalaan 5,
Amersfoort, Netherlands.

Many other examples could be cited of how new strength can be experienced through solidarity and cooperative action, not only by women, but by all Christians, everywhere. Church women should remember the time-tested basic principle of ecumenism first cited at an early consultation of Faith and Order held in Lund, Sweden—*Never do separately what you can do better together.*



Enriching Resources

The Consultation of Church Women Executives at Glion produced a wealth of rich resource material for worship and discussion. We have space here to bring you only a selected few of these.*

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STRATEGIES FOR ACTION ON BEHALF OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Planned strategies for church women are vital to effective social action. This outline gives perspectives from the point of view of

- women attending the consultation,
- countries in which human rights are being denied, and
- countries with policies supporting or collaborating with those who deny human liberties and freedom.

Strategies must first be aimed at a person's own government, its officials and representatives, such as ambassadors, legislators, state departments, special-interest groups and lobbies.

The United Nations, the largest body influencing global action, is a key organization. The signing of its International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civic and Political Rights is a first requisite for all member nations. Many countries have still not done this, and church groups are urged, as an

* Others were summarized in the series of mimeographed bulletins which were produced during the meeting. A limited number of these are still available through the WCC office on Women in Church and Society.

immediate goal, to pressure their respective governments to sign these Covenants, and to promote acceptance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The formal acceptance of these principles provides a practical framework for further action.

In 1975, 35 nations signed the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Agreement). Built into this is the so-called "third basket" which contains provisions on human rights, and affirms that each of the signatories will allow such rights as "freedom of movement", "reunification of families", "cultural, religious and education exchange programmes", and media freedom.

Likewise built into the Helsinki Agreement is provision for an evaluation conference to assess and monitor observance of these affirmations. This, in fact, took place in 1977 in Belgrade.

It is also suggested that wherever appropriate church groups themselves conduct citizens' hearings on denial of rights, gathering evidence and testimony on denial of emigration, refusal of visas, arbitrary censorship of the press, unlawful imprisonment without charge or trial, etc. Copies of these proceedings could then be given to national representatives, to the media and to church networks for publication and transmittal.

Political prisoners are a paramount concern. The most powerless people are those in prison. Jesus announced his ministry in the words of Isaiah: *Behold, I come to set captives free*. Imprisonment without charge or fair trial is a fundamental denial of rights. Imprisonment for political dissent is a heinous crime against persons. Yet false charges are often levelled simply to remove dissent from political dialogue, to prevent freedom of speech or to silence the press.

Where possible, church women are urged to visit prisoners, to write to them and speak out on their behalf, in the media, in court or to government officials. They can monitor prison conditions, including prison diet, cells and regulations. There will be rebuffs, but only a free person can challenge the conditions suffered by prisoners. In these ways, church women can translate into effective action the words of Jesus: *I was in prison and you visited me*. Amnesty International proclaimed 1977 "The Year of the Prisoner of Conscience". Church women can support this initiative by taking their own or collaborative effective action.

*

WHO CARES ?

IF YOU were served with a banning order AND...

YOU had to report to the Police Station at the same time every day or every week, being charged if you forgot...

YOU had to give up your profession because you were not allowed to enter a factory or teaching institution...

YOU could not write anything for publication and so were muzzled...

YOU had to remain in one magisterial district and could not go for a holiday or even for a drive...

YOU had to shut yourself away while your family chatted with relatives or friends at home...

YOU could not yourself entertain your friends or family at home or visit them in their homes...

YOU could never meet with more than one person at a time, and had to turn away from your friends in the street...

YOU were in limbo for five or ten or more years...

YOU were refused a reason for all this suffering...

YOU were denied the right to prove your innocence in a Court of Law...

WOULDN'T YOU CARE?

IF...

YOU were seized by the Security Police and held for months and months without being brought to trial...

YOU were kept totally helpless in the hands of the Security Police...

YOU were kept in solitary confinement and interrogated for hours and days...

YOU did not even know if anyone knew where you were...

YOU were not allowed to see your lawyer or your family...

YOU were isolated and afraid for your life and your future...

YOU did not know why you had been arrested...

YOU were denied the right to prove your innocence in a Court of Law...

WOULDN'T YOU CARE?

WE ARE STILL WAITING

My sisters tell me
how people die of hunger
because there is no food to eat.

My sisters tell me
how people die of lack of hope
because they do not see a way out.

My sisters tell me
how people die of fear
submerged in silence, the silence of death.

My sisters tell me
how people die of sadness
because they have heaped treasures
and have lost their souls.

My sisters tell me
how people die of courage
because they have dared to speak up
to shout out against their oppressors.

My heart is trembling.
Couldn't He have turned those
stones into bread?
Couldn't He have jumped from
the temple walls?
Couldn't He have declared
Himself ruler of the earth
and established the Kingdom?

Why those millions of bitter sighs?
Why those tears of anger?
Why those broken hopes and dreams?
Why that naked despair
in the eyes of the little boy
—my boy—
as he tried to escape the machine guns?

Jesus Christ, the Son of God,
called the Prince of Peace
and (by mistake of the Roman authorities)
King of the Jews,
was executed
according to the fashion of the
occupant forces,
and died on the cross.
He had no army.
He had no resources.
He had no connections with the elite.
He did not turn stones into bread.
He did not establish the Kingdom.
He had no power.

We are still waiting for the miracle.
The devil is still tempting us,

As if Christ were not risen,
As if the promise were not ours,
As if we could not have courage to dare,
As if we had to be afraid,
As if the power of the Lord
were not present in our weakness.
We are still waiting for the miracle

As if...



A PRAYER FROM GLION

Coming from all parts of the world, we know that we are divided by all shades of political opinion, all varieties of social commitment. Yet we are one in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are united in the conviction that imprisonment for political or ideological reasons, whatever they may be, is contrary to his will. We invite you to join with us in prayer for those who thus suffer.

Lord,
 God of justice and peace,
 who stands with those who are poor,
 who asks us to be the voice of the voiceless,
 we call upon you

For those who are put into prison because of their convictions.

*Out of the depths we cry to you, Lord.
 Hear our cries, and listen to our prayers.*

For those who are thereby cut off from family,
 friends, and community,
 that they may know the presence of those who
 support them and of the One
 who knows their agony.

*Out of the depths we cry to you, Lord.
 Hear our cries, and listen to our prayers.*

For those who are tortured, maimed, raped,
 that their spirits may not be broken by their bodies' pain.

*Out of the depths we cry to you, Lord.
 Hear our cries, and listen to our prayers.*

For those who do not know what further suffering
 the future may hold for them, that they may not lose
 faith, for you hold their future in your hands.

*Out of the depths we cry to you, Lord.
 Hear our cries, and listen to our prayers.*

For families deprived of mother or father
 that they may bear uncertainty through faith
 and may find help to meet daily suffering.

*Out of the depths we cry to you, Lord.
 Hear our cries, and listen to our prayers.*

Finally we pray that your promise of justice may
 become real to all for whom we pray
 that they may be released.

*Out of the depths we cry to you, Lord.
 Hear our cries, and listen to our prayers.
 For you are gracious, and there is in you
 that which is to be feared,
 that which forgives,
 that which strengthens,
 that which comforts.*

AMEN

BIBLE STUDY

by DENISE PEETERS

I am well aware that it is dangerous to want to find in the Scriptures, at any price, a code of life, a rule which defies time and cultures, and that a *manipulation* of the texts presents a real temptation as well as a trap. However, I do believe that, without qualms, we can try to affirm the coincidence between the theme of human rights and the theme of liberation which is the main thread of the entire Old Testament. This theme, culminating in the Book of Exodus, which at that time identified itself with a true social and political liberation of the Hebrew people, finds its zenith in the New Testament, its fulfilment in the person of Jesus Christ, God made Man, pledge of the alliance and the promise, God intervening in history.

Let us dwell on this *irruption* of God in history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, on what his life, his words, his attitude, and his message have contributed to personal, social and political liberation or, speaking in today's terms, to the defence of human rights. And to understand better the significance of this contribution, the context of the Roman and Jewish society in which Jesus lived must be reviewed. The Roman Empire was at its peak, with all the centralizing unity and the administrative cohesion which characterized it. It was a society built on the values of discipline and military qualities, respect for authority and power, but fundamentally unequal. The upper classes lived in luxury, idleness, and debauchery. The slaves represented one third of the population; they were not considered as persons, with human and legal rights, but as *things* belonging to their masters. The Romans despised the peoples they had conquered and taxed them heavily. The Jews suffered from this domination and exploitation; they were the proud *Chosen People*, chosen by God. But neither the Jews nor the Romans had the concept of human freedom applicable to *all* human beings: they were racists and class-conscious. Power was at the service of the ruling class. In such a context Jesus proclaimed the Good News that God is the Father of all without exception, Our Father, which makes us all brothers and sisters; that God is present in each one of us; that the spirit of God is in us, that God loves us *all*, that the name of each one of us is written in the palm of his hand. In the eyes of God we *all* have priceless value.

*Think of the ravens. They do not sow or reap;
they have no store-houses and no barns; yet
God feeds them. And how much more are you
than the birds?*

Luke 12:24

Whenever possible, Jesus stressed the personal value of each human being, no matter what their social status. He wanted the people of his time to understand that their value was not dependent on the social values prevailing at that time:

power, wealth, social standing, physical strength, intellectual capacities, high position vis-à-vis the law, or even religion. Each time he was faced with a conflict or an opposition of values, he favoured the dignity and liberty of the human person, he opposed the domination

of the rigid law over true love,
 of the letter which kills over the spirit which regenerates,
 of the hypocritical Pharisee over the humble Publican,
 of the guilty accusers over the adulterous woman,
 of the proud Jews over the outcast Gentiles,
 of unjust power over weakness,
 of hate over love.

There was no ambiguity in his interpersonal relations; disdaining the taboos of the time, he was unequivocally on the side of the weak, the poor, the oppressed, although this was something unthinkable for Roman customs or in the eyes of the Jewish establishment. And all the time he knew very well that this would lead to his doom.

At the beginning of his public life, in the synagogue of Nazareth, it is with the words of Isaiah that he announces his mission:

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has appointed me, he has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

Luke 4: 18-19

But the liberation he proposed entailed certain demands which at that time must have seemed to be extravagant—as they still seem to us today. Those whom he called upon left their families and their work. He asked of them total commitment and total confidence in the Father who would provide for everything. However, what he expected in response to his call was a free and responsible decision. Let us remember the episode of the rich young man.

To those who followed him, Jesus brought a certain assurance.

But when they hand you over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say: what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes; because it is not you who will be speaking: the spirit of your Father will be speaking in you.

Matthew 10:19-20

I tell you most solemnly: anything you ask for from the Father he will grant in my name.

John 16:23

Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

John 14:27

An assurance named *Hope*. But the liberation proposed by Jesus is not limited to the transmission of a message; it is also a new way of life. He invites those who wish to be his disciples to experience human existence at a more profound level, that is to say in intimate communion with him in the service of others. Moreover, and above all, he reveals to them the intimate and personal link which exists between man and God whom he calls *Father*. And it is this fundamental dimension of liberation in Jesus Christ which naturally transcends the concept of human rights and gives it a specifically Christian character which we recognize. Jesus invites us to follow him because he is the way which leads to the Father; no one goes to the Father except through him. *As the Father loves me, so do I love you*. As this awareness of the link with God develops in us, we also succeed in understanding better human needs and rights. To live in union with God through Jesus is liberation from fear and anguish deep within us. Naturally, we shall always have fears and apprehensions for ourselves and for our future and for our action for a more just society. But above and beyond these fears there will be a more acute, a more profound meaning of our mission on this earth, and in our union with God we shall find the strength to serve our neighbour. It is also on this level that peace and true joy are attained.

*I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you
and your joy be complete.*

John 15:11

Therefore, fulfilment of the human being, according to the teaching of Christ, lies in the gift of one's self to others, in union with the Father, through Jesus. The social dimension of liberation in Christ is undeniable since Jesus himself told us that the essential of his Law is to love God and one's neighbour as one's self. However, one cannot love one's neighbour as one's self without being profoundly concerned with justice, a better distribution of worldly goods, a better sharing of riches. In face of the profound social inequalities of his time, Jesus took a stand and resolutely stood on the side of the small, the humble, the weak, and the dispossessed, and all this in defiance of all the laws of that time. He did not despise the rich per se, but because of the bad use they made of their worldly goods (Cf. Luke 19:8, the story of Zacchaeus, and the parable of the rich young man).

In Matthew 23, as well as in Luke 17, Jesus associates the hypocrisy of the Pharisees with the injustice of the rich. He also tells us what will be the criteria in the Day of the Last Judgment:

Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world! For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me... I tell you solemnly, insofar as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.

Matthew 25:34-40

Here, too, Jesus proposes a complete change in values regarding society and social relations. It is a radical protest against an unjust, egotistical and hypocritical society. The true love of God and of neighbour can never compromise with a society of abundance in a world of poverty, when huge sums are spent on armaments while the majority of humanity suffers from hunger and malnutrition.

This teaching also implies that salvation is not solely individual, but that it is also social and community-oriented. To work towards the Kingdom of God means that social relations must be changed, so that the essential is available to all. If the Good News means sharing with one another, witnessing to this Good News is not possible without action to remove the obstacles which oppose this sharing; that is to say, without a liberating combat which goes beyond and surmounts the barriers which prevent love and justice from building a true and fraternal human community.

This is an extraordinary personal challenge to each Christian conscience.

This social dimension of liberation logically leads us to consider the political dimension of Christ's message. Everyone is not yet ready to accept this concept and there are within our various churches different trends and opinions on this subject. Jesus of Nazareth is sometimes interpreted as one who had no political role and whose message does not concern the political problems of society. However, the Gospel gives abundant proof that Jesus took a stand with respect to the political and social problems of his times. This does not mean that his message was only political or social, and that he was a transitory or ephemeral leader or political agitator. First of all, and essentially, Jesus was a religious and spiritual leader. But as a Jewish religious leader, Jesus could not be unconcerned with the political implications of the moment. They were essential and represented the greatest part of the expectations of the Jewish people. Being oppressed under a foreign yoke, the Jews awaited the Messiah who would also be the one to liberate them from foreign domination. Politics and religion were so closely linked in those days that Jesus could not have been what he was if he had not had a message and a political option. The high priests were not only religious leaders; they also shared civil power with the occupying authorities.

And yet the liberation which Jesus proposed in the political field is at a far more profound and more essential level. He teaches that power is primarily service, specially dedicated to those who are in need. He challenged the manner in which authority was exercised by the civil and religious authorities of his time. His community and his Kingdom were different.

*Anyone who wants to become great among you must
be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first
among you must be slave to all.*

Mark 10:43

He laid the foundations of a new society, governed by an authority which is the expression of love and service and not one of brutal force and exploitation. He washed the feet of his disciples and asked them to do the same for others. Power must therefore be a true and incorruptible service, not seeking to satisfy

itself nor to perpetuate itself solely as power. Jesus judged and condemned the Roman power, but also the Jewish religious and civil leaders who supported it in hypocrisy and corruption. The political revolution that he sought meant the total disruption of current values.

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. To the man who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek, too.

Luke 6: 27-29

He was never neutral in face of injustice or exploitation, and the texts of the Gospel bear witness to this, whether we like it or not. But he did not give a recipe, a solution for all systems in all societies at all times. The teaching he gave was that power and law are at the service of love, justice, and liberty. As the absolute values of the Kingdom of God are justice, truth, liberty, authenticity, love, and peace, this teaching should suffice to orient and guide the conscience of all times.

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